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28 January 1957

Summary of Peffer Article China in Reappraisal: Menace  
to American Security? in POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY  
December 1956

I. Synopsis

The author starts by inquiring as to the basic reasons for our interest in China historically and at the present. He concludes that our interests were primarily trade and trade potential when we first developed a positive policy toward China in the days of John Hay. Whereas since 1945 our interests have been governed by security of the United States alone. Moreover, the key to the problem is not China itself but China's alliance with Russia. Recently our policy has been conditioned by a natural sense of fear compounded with resentment that a people we had befriended so much should join a hostile camp. Net result has been an "almost obsessive preoccupation" with China.

He then addresses himself to China's inherent strength pointing out the tendency of the United States during World War II to overweigh China's role as a great power military and otherwise. He finds China deficient in natural resources, technical skills and virtually everything except manpower and therefore concludes that "there is a long period to cushion any threat from China alone", though admitting that China could plunge the world into war if the Soviet Union were to support her in overt aggression.

In its own interest then he asserts: "What America can do is to contrive to give China no more ground for bitterness or provocation for recklessness than the whole state of world politics calls for."

Admitting that the Chinese are "swaggering, defiant, provocative," he stresses that the reasons for this lie not in their being Communists so much as in the psychological state of mind produced by the past century of helplessness and humiliation and points out that the Nationalists regime started behaving very truculently to all Occidentals and neighboring powers as early as 1927. The author then reviews the manner in which the Chinese most indiscreetly, considering their real power, goaded or at least presented excuses for the Japanese aggression in Manchuria in '31 and in the rest of China from '37 on and draws a

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 NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1990  
 AUTH: HQ 70-2  
 8 MAR 1980

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striking parallel to the way in which the present regime had its head turned by its all too easy victory in 1948 and 1949. As to the Korean War he correctly points out: "It was American reluctance to challenge Russia rather than respect for China that gave Chinese Communists immunity. But the Chinese saw only that they had bearded the world's strongest Power, the one that had humbled Japan. They had challenged it and revealed it a 'paper tiger'. It is in this psychology they now remain, and because of it they breathe fire, defy, threaten. In that mental and emotional state, too, they could let go in adventurism without calculating consequences and bring disaster on their country once more—but disaster on the whole world as well."

Turning then to factors affecting American policy, he stresses that the era 1900-1945 has no application. Moreover because of China's own impotence America need not fear her by herself but only as an accessory or spearhead of Russia. On this basis he is strongly critical of our emotional preoccupation with China as a menace by itself. Commenting on <sup>how</sup> non-recognition of the Peiping control of the country, arming of the Formosan regime and exclusion from the U.N. have contributed to a profound resentment on the part of the Peiping regime, he states that China and the U.S. confront each other "not so much in cold hostility as in tensed, rasped nerves."

His specific recommendations are first "not to take China too seriously. . ." to "shrug off her egregious words and gestures and give no provocation to passions already inflamed, no challenge to her swollen pride which she would feel obliged to vindicate." He feels that the substantive issues though serious are not formidable. He feels strongly that we must accord recognition because the regime is absolutely secure against overthrow by the Nationalists and there are no signs of serious disaffection among the Chinese people. Similarly he believes it is in the positive interest of the United States to grant Communist China the seat it claims in the U.N.

He concedes that Formosa is such the most difficult nut to crack and does not really come up with a solution but does deprecate the strategic importance of Formosa as China on the Mainland becomes stronger and stronger. His summary conclusion is that since Russia is the main enemy our relations with it are controlling and our policy toward China should be seen in that perspective; the problem is not exaggerated and judged by realities.

### II. Comment

The author's historical analysis seems to me essentially sound particularly on the psychological points he made. His economic forecast is however too pessimistic from the Red Chinese point of view. He implies that it will be decades before China is a significant world power by itself. Our estimate is that by the end of the 1960s—ten or a dozen years from now—China will have surpassed Japan and be roughly speaking tied with England and West Germany as the world's third most important industrial power.

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Despite this failure I am strongly inclined to concur in the general conclusions reached because they are if anything more valid the nearer the time is when we shall have to contend with China as a major power in its own right.

Since the article was written there has of course been the highly significant upgrading of China's position in the councils of the Communist Bloc as evidenced by the Statement of Doctrine of December 29th and Chou En-lai's peregrinations. Assuming that we get our ten prisoners released, it seems to me that a major alteration in our policy toward Peiping should be intensively and objectively canvassed at the highest levels of the government. From a purely intelligence point of view we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. From a cold war point of view I have the strong conviction, though it would be impossible to prove, that a rapprochement between the U.S. and the Chinese regime would be the most disconcerting step we could take as far as impact on the Kremlin's harassed rulers is concerned. I am certain it would enhance the President's leadership throughout all the free world except for a handful of countries in the Western Pacific, and it would do much to re-establish basic harmony of thought between us and our major allies.

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